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# EFL BLENDED-TEACHING PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY OF VULC

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## ABSTRACT

University lecturers are faced with challenges of student engagement in EFL classrooms. The distractions caused by the use of smartphones and other electronic devices are issues that need not only be addressed but also maximized in the delivery of lessons. Hence, this case study was undertaken to examine the blended-teaching practices of Vongchavalitkul University Language Center (VULC) lecturers, specifically the use Google Classroom. It also examined the digital devices used, the different educational applications integrated in Google, and the frequency of using the different applications were descriptively analyzed. In addition, the lecturers' opinions in the blended teaching were also discussed. The use of mobile devices in classroom teaching will be part of the future EFL curriculum. This implies that teaching outside the designated lecture hour is part of blended-learning environment. It was found that VULC lecturers have not fully utilized most of Google Apps for Education and other digital applications in their blended teaching.

**Keywords:** Blended-teaching, Google Classroom, Google Apps for Education, EFL and technology.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement in technology affects every aspect of modern life. However, technology also sees the rise of disruptive applications in the learning process. The affordability of mobile devices and internet connectivity lead to increased internet use in public spaces, homes, offices, and schools. In some way, this affects government policies like the case of Thailand 4.0. Thailand's educational sector is trying to keep up with technology and the Digital Age by adding digital tools as a seventh component in education reform (Sriratanaban 2018, The Nation).

Today's blended learning environment is characterized by the blending of technology, specifically, the use of internet, learning management systems, and digital tools in the physical and virtual classrooms. The use of smartphones, tablets and laptops in schools has become a major concern in students' learning engagement. It has caused divided attention among learners, between what is taught inside the classroom and what is being shared on social media. It is also a major concern among educational institutions and lecturers citing costs, sustainability and adaptability.

In the case of Vongchavalitkul University, Google Classroom was adapted as a learning management system in 2014. Additionally, VU Language Center lecturers address the issue of learners' engagement on maximizing the use of students' electronic devices as tools in blended-learning.

There are nine lecturers in VULC during the time of this study. Four are foreigners and five are Thais, three are males and six are females. Their EFL teaching experience ranges between three years and 35 years. Eight lecturers are using Google Classroom and a lecturer has an e-learning website in Google Sites. Seven lecturers had experienced using other learning management systems like Moodle, Edmodo, and NEO.

Many studies had been done in blended learning but only few highlights the lecturers' experiences in this environment. Hence, this study was undertaken to examine the blended-teaching practices of Vongchavalitkul University Language Center (VULC) lecturers, specifically how they utilized the use of Google Classroom and other associated applications, and the frequency of using these applications.

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This case study focused mainly on the blended-teaching practices in EFL of VULC lecturers, resulting in the following research questions:

(1) What are the blended teaching practices of VULC lecturers?

(2) What features of Google Classroom, Google Apps for Education and other online applications are utilized by the VULC lecturers in blended teaching?

(3) What is the frequency of accessing the Google Classroom by VULC lecturers?

## 3. SCOPE AND DELIMITATION

The respondents of this study were nine (9) lecturers of Vongchavalitkul University Language Center (VULC). This study was conducted during the first semester of Academic Year of 2018.

## 4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This case study is based on the blended teaching matrix conceptualized by Graham, et al. (2017). The blended teaching matrix identifies the four categories of interactions involved in blended learning. These are Technology-Mediated Interaction or Quadrant 1 (Q1); Digital Content Interaction, Quadrant 2 (Q2); Face-to-Face Interaction, Quadrant 3 (Q3); and, Non-Digital Content or Quadrant 4 (Q4). Figure 1 shows the blended teaching matrix.

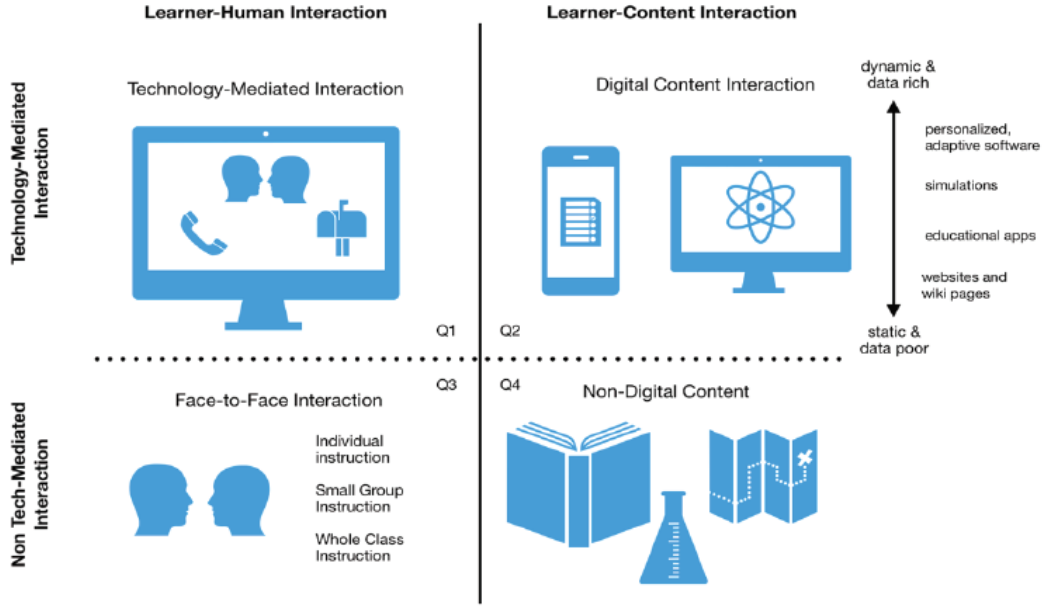


**Figure 1: Blended teaching matrix identifying the four categories of interactions involved in blended learning** (Graham, Borup, Pulham, & Larsen, 2017)

Graham et al. (2017) describe the general teaching skills necessary to blended teaching as: (a) In-person teaching, which requires Q3 + Q4 skills; (b) Technology integrated teaching, which requires Q2 + Q3 + Q4 skills; (c) Online teaching, which requires Q1 + Q2 + (Q4) skills; and, (d) Blended teaching, which requires Q1 + Q2 + Q3 +Q4.

## 5. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ellis et al. (2006:324-326) defined blended-teaching into four categories as (1) helping students develop and apply new concepts, (2) developing student understanding through aligning media to intended learning outcomes, (3) providing students with information, and (4) replacing part of the responsibility of being a teacher. Ellis et al. (2006) added that the heart of this understanding of blended teaching is an awareness of intended student learning outcomes as enabled by the technologies. In blended learning, the lecturer's role significantly shifts from being lecturer to a facilitator (Poon, 2013). The facilitator encourages students to be responsible for their learning, create a robust learning environment that allows students to collaborate and engage with peers and

construct new knowledge (Bradley 2010, Poon 2013), provide students with opportunities to share life experiences, perspectives, and develop critical thinking (Martinez & McGrath, 2014).

Basing from the results of previous studies, lecturers have mixed viewpoints with the blending of technology in the classroom because (a) Blended learning method may differ according to their level of knowledge in technology (Garrison & Vaughan, 2013). This is because the lecturer's attitudes toward the adoption of technology-rich blended-learning were significantly correlated to the overall incentives of the adoption of technology-rich blended learning (Moukali 2012:132); (b) Lecturers need to invest time in mastering their technology skills and benefit from the prosperity of digital resources to achieve a successful implementation (Imbriale 2013). They have to relearn the teaching skills using the new media formats (Freeman & Tremblay, 2013); (c) Lecturers with negative perceptions about the blended learning method may be reflected in poor student achievement (Deutsch 2010); and, (d) Lecturers who are afraid of using technology or lack knowledge in technology will have more challenges to course implementation because they will use the minimum resources required to succeed (Johnson et al., 2012).

Interestingly, female lecturers tend to have more positive attitudes toward the blended learning method than male but the latter were more advanced in the implementation of blended learning (Villalon, 2017). In Thailand's context, blended teaching among Thai EFL lecturers can be summed up to: (1) not using the internet and relying only on available learning materials, (2) active learning mixed with technology, (3) blended learning interaction ceases after the class, (4) lecturers would like to do online teaching, but are not adept with technology, and (5) utilizing the available learning materials from the internet without assessing the learners' level (Verapreyagoon, 2018).

Blended and online teaching requires competencies. This approach has become problematic because blended teaching is becoming "the new normal" in education (Norberg, Dzubian, & Moskal, 2011) but there is the lack of competency and skills training in higher educational institutions. Pulham, et al., (2018) enumerate that blended and online teaching competencies are: (1) Generic. Competencies in this category could apply to teaching in any modality: online, in-person, or blended; (2) On-Line/digital. These competencies are specific to an online environment or a purely digital skill, whether a web-based program or local software; (3) In-person. These competencies are is specific to an in-person environment; and, (4) Blended. This category includes competencies that integrate in-person and online components.

### 5.1. Google Classroom

Vongchavalitkul University adapted the use of Google Classroom during its release in August of 2014. Google Classroom is a simplified learning management system for users of Google Apps for Education (Amanda and Katie, 2015). According to its website, this application for teachers will enable them to "save time, keep classes organized and improve communication with students" all through its ability to directly connect with Gmail, Google Drive, and other Google Apps. All files in Google Classroom are automatically in Google Drive. According to Regis (2016), Google Classroom is about empowerment, choice, teamwork and scale. Also, Google Classroom prioritize simplicity and collaboration and could serve as a bridge between classrooms and the technological infrastructure that administrators use to measure student learning (Keeler in Fenton 2017). It is also interoperability, which could provide a bridge between the students and faculty who already work in G Suite for Education and other online applications.

## 6. METHODOLOGY

The instrument used in this case study was a survey questionnaire in Google Forms. The researcher also observed classroom lectures for verification. The data were analyzed using Mean ($\bar{\chi}$), and Standard Deviation (S.D.). The findings from the data were descriptively analyzed to indicate the VULC lecturers' use of blending applications in EFL teaching, and the frequency of using Google Classroom and other applications.

## 7. FINDINGS

The findings of this study are shown in the following tables:

| Applications | English Language Skills | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Listening | Speaking | Reading | Writing |
| YouTube | 7 | - | - | - |
| Video Projects | 6 | 7 | - | - |
| News Sites + Pen & Paper | - | - | 6 | 3 |
| Google Docs | - | - | 4 | 3 |
| Coggle | - | - | 2 | 2 |
| Google Forms | - | - | 3 | - |
| Kahoot or Quizizz | - | - | 3 | - |
| QR Codes + Google Forms | 2 | - | 2 | 2 |
| Google Sites | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| FlippedMe | 1 | 1 | 1 | - |

**Table 1: VULC lecturers' blended teaching practice in English language skills**

Table 1 shows VULC lecturers' blended teaching practice in English language skills. Seven lecturers blend YouTube in teaching listening. Six lecturers blend their students' video projects in listening and seven lecturers asked their students to video themselves as a project in speaking. Six lecturers used news websites blended with pen-and-paper activities in reading while three lecturers used this in teaching writing. Four lectures blended Google docs in reading while three lecturers blended it in writing activities. Coggle, Google Forms, Kahoot, Quizizz, QR Codes blended with Google Forms, Google Sites and FlippedMe were also used in blended teaching.

**Table 2: Frequency of using Google Classroom features by VULC lecturers in blended-teaching**

| Features | Frequency of Use | SD | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Using **Create announcement** tab in uploading lessons | 3.75 | 1.753 | Most of the time |
| …posting reminders | 3.88 | 1.808 | Most of the time |
| Using **Create assignment** tab in writing activities | 2.75 | 1.165 | Sometimes |
| …giving home works | 3.88 | 1.552 | Most of the time |
| …unfinished classroom activity | 4.25 | 1.389 | Most of the time |
| Using **Create question** tab in forum | 3.63 | 1.407 | Sometimes |
| …interactional activities | 3.00 | 1.309 | Sometimes |
| Mean ($\bar{\chi}$) | 3.52 | 0.234 | Most of the time |

Table 2 shows the frequency of using Google Classroom features utilized by the VULC lecturers in blended-teaching. The mean value of 3.52, SD of 0.234, means VULC lecturers use Google Classroom features most of the time.

**Table 3: Frequency of using Google Apps for Education in blended-teaching by VULC lecturers**

| Google Apps for Education | Frequency of Use | SD | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Google Docs | 2.88 | 1.458 | Sometimes |
| Google Sheets | 3.13 | 1.552 | Sometimes |
| Google Forms | 3.88 | 1.458 | Most of the |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | time |
| Google Slides | 2.00 | 1.414 | Rarely |
| Google Translate | 2.13 | 1.458 | Rarely |
| Google Drive | 4.13 | 1.458 | Most of the time |
| Mean ($\bar{\chi}$) | 2.94 | 0.046 | Sometimes |

Table 3 shows the frequency of using Google Apps for Education in blended-teaching by VULC lecturers. The mean value 2.94, SD of 0.046, means VULC lecturers use Google Apps for Education sometimes.

**Table 4: Frequency of using Google Docs file templates by VULC lecturers**

| Google Docs file templates | Frequency of Use | SD | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Attendance Sheet (Google Sheet) | 1.50 | 1.414 | Rarely |
| Grade Book (Google Sheet) | 1.50 | 1.414 | Rarely |
| Quiz (Google Forms) | 2.00 | 1.414 | Rarely |
| Survey (Google Forms) | 2.13 | 1.642 | Rarely |
| Mean ($\bar{\chi}$) | 1.78 | 0.114 | Rarely |

Table 4 shows the frequency of using Google Docs file templates in blended-teaching by VULC lecturers. The mean value 1.78, SD of 0.114, means VULC lecturers rarely use Google Docs file templates in blended teaching.

**Table 5: Frequency of accessing the Google Classroom**

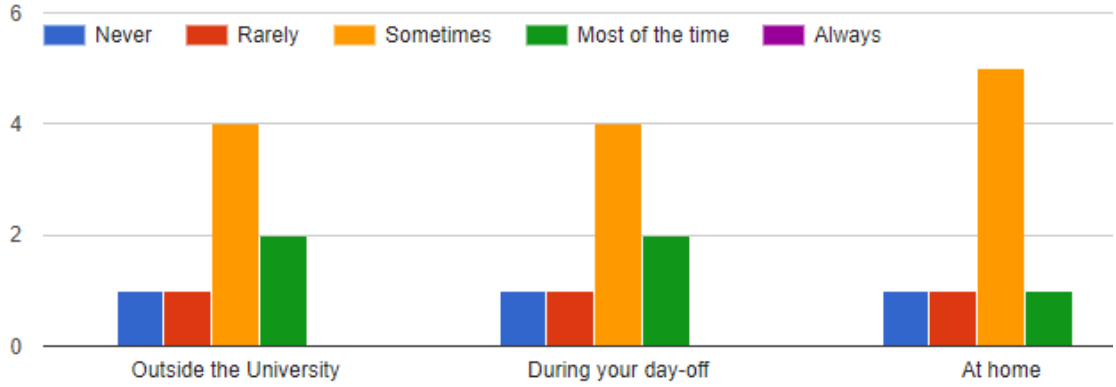


Table 5 shows that most of VULC lecturers access Google Classroom even outside the university, during their day-offs or even at home.

### 7.1 Other Findings

(1) VULC lecturers frequently use internet-connected notebooks and smartphones in blended teaching.

(2) VULC lecturers allow their students to use smartphones as an aid for translation.

### 7.2 VULC lecturers' opinion on blended teaching using Google Classroom

Lecturer 1 and Lecturer 5 said that they like the flexibility and interoperability of Google Classroom. They emphasized that:

> *"I am using both my laptop and mobile device but rely on my mobile the most. I always carry my mobile while moving around my classroom – checking students' attendance through the* ***Attendance Sheet*** *and giving scores in Google Classroom activities right away. I require my students to bring their smartphones because I'm giving online quiz using* ***Google Forms****, and asynchronous writing activity in Google Docs. I'm always exploring the other features of Google Apps for Education and share my findings with my co-lecturers. I'm now looking for ways to embed audio files in Google Forms (Quiz)."*

Lecturer 2 expressed that:

*"I need to learn how to fully use it. I don't want to be left behind."*

Lecturer 3 commented that some students do not have smartphones.

*"Most first year students are still adjusting with the integration of mobile devices in language learning inside the physical classroom."*

Lecturer 4 mentioned that Google Classroom forced him to explore more.

*"I developed some IT skills. I accidentally discovered the use of QR codes in my teaching, the shortening of URLs and a lot more."*

All the lecturers agreed that internet connection affects their blended-teaching. This is because of the intermittent WiFi signal in the building that they are using.

## 8. IMPLICATIONS

VULC lecturers should constantly update their blended-teaching skills in Google Classroom because the use of mobile devices in classroom teaching would be a part of the future EFL curriculum. Blended teaching does not stop after the lecture and teaching outside the designated lecture hour is part of blended-learning environment, it is recommended that another study would be undertaken on this particular issue.

## 9. CONCLUSION

VULC lecturers do not fully maximized the use Google Classroom as a learning management system and Google Apps for Education and other digital applications in EFL blended teaching. Except for the basic features of Google Classroom, most of the lecturers are yet to explore and acquaint themselves with the other associated digital tools in blended teaching and blended learning environment.

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